L: Handbooks E-4,5 (1936) 1937 HV3 Haiti HV3

manifest themselves in large number. The majority of African traits, however, derive from the geographical center of the slaving area, especially from the region of Dahomey. Even the famous word "voodoo" is Dahomean, as all Haitian writers and some Europeans and Americans have recognized. Whatever its meaning in Haiti at the present time, its derivation is clear. It is the *vodun* of the Fon-speaking people,—a word which is best translated as "god." Names of gods, and social and economic institutions, point their origin to this same Dahomean source. This being the case, it may be well to give a general description of the civilization of these Dahomeans, as an aid in the interpretation of the various phases of Haitian peasant life which are to be considered in the ensuing pages.*

In their basic attitude toward life the people of Dahomey have achieved a blend between co-operation and competition. Living in a society which, from before the time of contact with the Europeans, had a pecuniary base, with its resulting competitive drives, the desire to gain wealth both as an end in itself and for the prestige to be derived from its display is outstanding in native psychology. At the same time, and most particularly in the field of production, co-operative endeavor is to be found throughout the kingdom. As with all West African folk, agriculture is the most important element in Dahomean economy. Other forms of production are iron-working, brass-casting, weaving of cotton and raffia cloth, the making of appliquéd designs on ceremonial cloths, and the manufacture of pottery.

A large part of the heavy labor in Dahomey is done by means of the co-operative groups known by the term *dokpwe*. These associations not only clear the fields, but do the strenuous work of erecting walls for houses and compound enclosures and of thatching. When work is to be done, the one who is in need of the services of a *dokpwe* goes to the chief and arranges for the men to work for him on a given day. If he

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other one which has been known there for many years, principally in the west, which bears the name of *Vaudoux*. . . . But it is not only as a dance that the *Vaudoux* merits consideration, for it occurs under circumstances which assign to it a place among the institutions where superstition and bizarre practices play a considerable part."[1]

In Dahomey, whence the term has come, *vodun*, as has already been stated, signifies "god" and is a general name for all deities. This source of the word has likewise long been known, as a reading of St. Mery shows:

> "According to the Arada Negroes, the real followers of *Vaudoux* in the colony . . . *Vaudoux* signifies an all-powerful and supernatural being on which depend all the events that come to pass on this globe."[2]

Similarly, de Vaumière[3] quotes with approval a parallel definition from Peytraud, while modern Haitian writers also emphasize its Dahomean origin.[4] This meaning of the word had, however, undergone a change in its new home even during pre-Revolutionary times, for, according to St. Mery, the "all-powerful and supernatural being" had come to be a non-venomous serpent that stood as a symbol "for all those who professed this same doctrine." Today in Mirebalais even this identification is a thing of the past, though the prominence given serpent-worship in Haiti by most writers[5] would make it reasonable to suppose that elsewhere in the island serpents are maintained by priests of the *vodun* cult and play an important role in the rites at which the gods are worshipped. Indeed, one priest from Arcahaie encountered in Mirebalais mentioned the fact that in his own temple he kept such a snake. Yet in our valley no worship of serpents as such was encountered, and there were even those who declared that they had no hesitation in killing any snake, though these brave assertions could not be tested. Serpent-worship in Mirebalais

of the dead must be deferred for a later chapter. Similarly, the discussion of the final elements in Haitian religion, the belief in magic, must also be reserved for later pages, stressing here only its separate identity from the worship of the *loa*, with which it has been too often confused.[10]

The most striking element in the *vodou* cult is the manner in which the gods possess their devotees. Despite the fact that this is the aspect of Haitian religion that seems to the casual observer its least restrained and least disciplined, possession occurs according to well-defined rules and under specifically defined circumstances. And since it is through an analysis of possession that the clearest understanding can be reached of the meaning of the *loa* to those who worship them, the manner in which they influence the lives of their devotees and exert their powers for good or evil, possession may be treated at some length.[11]

When a person is possessed for the first time, the spirit which is said to animate him is known as a *loa bossal*, an "untamed" god. The word *bossal*, which in the early days was applied to newly arrived Africans,[12] has always been a term of contumely, and today the same feeling-tone is continued through the belief that since all things in the universe are subject to observable regulation, and animals and plants and human beings must all live according to these rules, the *loa*, as members of society, may not manifest the unrestrained and often dangerous traits of unpredictable behavior which characterize them before they have been "baptized" and thus brought under proper control.

Baptism of a deity most often occurs when a boy or girl is possessed by a family *loa*, especially if it is one which gives that knowledge of healing and divination meant by the word *connaissance*. Sometimes, though not always, this possession is violent, and the prospective devotee rages about the house, destroying whatever comes to hand. On occasion, since custom frowns on possession at a ceremony not given by the family of

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urge us "feed" his *loa* in order to satisfy it, for it is more important to give offerings to the spirits than to dance for them. He therefore either quietly prepares a sacrifice of cereals and liquor in his own room or sends money home to that his *loa* may be "fed" at the family habitation, and his absence explained to it."

When voodoo deities are discussed in Mirebalais, most often two "companies" of them are mentioned, the Rada and the Pétro "squads." In one list of gods that was obtained, the word *Rada*, derived from the name of the ancient principality of Allada in Dahomey, called forth the explanation "*qui veut dire Dahomey* — which is to say, Dahomey," though it should be made clear that neither the words *Rada* nor *Dahomey* are any longer recognized in Haiti as place-names, being today simply qualifying designations of *loa*. There are regional differences in the number and ranking of other categories of gods that hold no important place in Mirebalais. The existence of these other categories is, of course, well known, and one person referred to "the seventeen and twenty-one classes of *loa*," of which, however, only the following were named: Rada, Pétro, Dahomey, Guinée, Congo, Nago, Ibo, and Wangol. Of these the Congo and the Ibo gods are well known, though their worship is chiefly restricted to individual families, while the Nago and Dahomey categories, though significant from the point of view of indicating African origins, are most commonly grouped under the term *Rada*. Guinée also occasionally figures in worship as carried on in individual families, but this term is more often understood as a general designation for all *loa* outside the Rada, Nago, Congo, and Ibo groupings and for certain Pétro gods. Wangol derives from the geographical entity Angola.

From comparatively early times the impression has been given that certain of these classes of gods perform only good, and others evil. Nothing could be further from the truth than this attempt to read European concept into Haitian ideology.

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d'Angole) is obviously Angola, while the designations Ibo and Congo speak for themselves. Simbi is a Congo deity, as are Bumba and Kumba. Finally, in the categories of gods important in the regions of Haiti other than Mirebalais are the Loa Sénégal, and the Loa Mondong, both of which are names of African tribes mentioned in the early literature as contributing to the Haitian slave population. But all recognition of geographical names as such has disappeared, and they have been transmuted into designations of gods.

Outstanding here is the word *vodou* itself, already indicated as Dahomean, where it is a general term for "deity," though in Haiti its use has become more restricted and the symbol for deity has become the word *loa*, or *mystère*. The origin of the designation *loa*, which has been claimed to be a corruption of the French *roi*, is debatable. It is true that in West Africa certain deities are regarded as kings, yet this derivation is not convincing in view of the fact that in the *vodou* cult as found in Haiti at present or as described in earlier sources the *loa* are never generally referred to as kings, something that tends to strengthen statements that have been made to the effect that the word comes from the language of a Congo tribe.[1] The source of the root *hun-*, which figures in the terms *hungan*, *hunsi*, and *humfort*, is clear, for in Dahomey it is a synonym for the word *vodun*. *Hungan* and *hunsi* are even more definitely traceable than *humfort*, since the ending *-gan*, the Dahomean word for chief, designates the priest as the chief of the spirits, and *-si*, "wife," is employed in the sense of "wife of the god" or his devotee, in Africa as in Haiti. The female counterpart of *hungan*, *mambu*, cannot be definitely assigned, but may be of Bantu derivation, and is certainly an African word.

Other uncontaminated Africanisms can be discerned in the attitude of the Haitians toward the *loa* and in the ceremonies for them. One of the most characteristic is the inheritance of *loa* in families, a direct survival of the belief which not only

[P 9]

2. Man and the Universe: Vodoun

When the African slaves stepped ashore in the New World they brought with them highly developed religious beliefs and attitudes toward life. But Africa was a continent of many cultures and nations, and its belief systems varied. The Congo African did not have the same view of the natural and supernatural as the Senegalese, for example; and even neighboring peoples such as the Ibos, the Yorubas, and the Mahis did not have common religious traditions. Yet in the strange new land that was Haiti, the common elements in their religious beliefs were accented. In time a new composite religious system emerged. It was called Vodoun.

The preponderance of Africans in Haiti came from the region of Dahomey, Togoland, Nigeria, and the Congo River basin. Among them the Dahomeans were the most numerous, and it was they who provided the framework for the Afro-Haitian religious system.

The word Vodoun itself is Dahomean in origin. Among the Fon-speaking people of West Africa it signified "spirit," or "deity." In Haiti the word came to be applied in a general sense to all the activities of cult life, from the ritual of the "temple" to the songs and dances, though in some old songs it still applies specifically to the idea of a supernatural spirit. However, the Congo word *lua* came to be used to designate the deities.[1]

In a literal sense, Vodoun in Haiti consists of the rites, beliefs, and practices of the Vodoun cult, built around the similar religious systems of the Dahomeans and the Nagos. In a wider sense it applies to similar but distinct ritual activities of other cults. The Ibo-Kanga rites and dances are in a specific sense "not quite" Vodoun. The rites in the Congo-Guinée cult group—made up of Congo, Bambarra, "Guinée," and miscellaneous elements—have separate practices and deities of their own, and are often regarded as not Vodoun at all. Yet the term Vodoun is used in a generic sense to include all these rites, and examination of the beliefs and activities of these cult groups shows that they have drawn in considerable measure upon a common inheritance.

[1] [See Courlander, Haiti Singing, p. 7. Cf. P349, Category 116.--Analyst]

2: Courlander B-6 (1937-1958) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

The yam

itself was transplanted from Africa, where in old times as well as in modern it was a staff of life among those who lived by agriculture. The word "yam" is known throughout large parts of Africa, crossing language lines and forests. It signifies the big root on which the African is so dependent, and it also has the general meaning of "eat." In Senegal it is called *nyami*, while across the width of Africa and in the upper Nile region it is called *nyam*.

In Haiti the yam is a tie with the past and a symbol of fertility. When the yams are plentiful, there is food for the winter months and a sense of well-being. When the yam crop is poor, there is insecurity and even hunger. Whatever occurs, lurking in the background is the shadow of the family ancestors, for it is they who have the power to enhance the crops or blight them. This is the concept around which the mangé yam is built.

The annual harvest feast, on the twenty-fifth of November, is rooted in the need for placating the ancestors, so that the dead will insure the fertility of the fields. Before the feast, no yams may be eaten, for the crop must be "baptized" first. Should this rule be violated the yams will spoil and those who eat them will become sick. The precise form of the mangé yam varies from region to region. Sometimes it is held on the premises of the cult chief for the community at large. More traditionally it is held on the family *habitation*, with a houngan in attendance. It is felt that an important obligation rests upon those who have wandered away from the homestead to return for the occasion. For the fate of the family depends to a large degree upon the successful appeal to the vast host of the ancestral dead, and the solidarity of the living in this effort is regarded as vital. Even if one belongs to a Christian sect which proscribes Vodoun, he is obligated and ready to come, for the welfare of the family is paramount. Catholics, Adventists, and Protestants alike participate. As the Haitians say, it is an affair for all who eat yams, and that means all Haitians.

Yams are washed and prepared for eating during the service. They are cut in small portions, placed in dishes or calabash bowls, and offered to the dead, who have prime rights. All categories of the dead are fed—those who are remembered, those who can be recalled only by name, and those whose names are forgotten. The dead of Haiti are invoked, then the dead of Africa. The maraja dead are fed from separate gourds or bowls, and a special table is set for the ancient dead who move slowly because of their age or infirmities, and who may take a long while to arrive at the mangé. A share of the yams is offered to the family loa. Then the members of the family receive symbolic portions. There is singing, drumming, and dancing, and sometimes ritual baths are taken. Afterward, when the yam feast is ended, the crops may be gathered, stored, and eaten.

2: Courlander B-6 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

in construction but stands a little shorter. Two Pétro drums of slightly different sizes and tones, called *baka* and *ti baka*, in combination with one or more rattles, an iron percussion device, and sometimes an assot, make up an orchestra. 534

The *assot* is a small board which is beaten with sticks. Often these sticks are flat, and sometimes a small wooden bench is substituted for the board.

Dances for which the Congo or Pétro drums are used include Pétro, Kitta, Bumba, Salongo, Bamharra, Moundongue, Congo Lnangue, Pastorel, Mousondi, and Moutchétché. The drum for the Congo Lnangue dance formerly was somewhat taller and narrower than the present Pétro drum, but the distinction is no longer maintained. 534 535

The Juba, or Martinique, drum is similar to the Pétro or Congo but wider and squatter. It is laid on its side for playing, the drummer sitting astride and pressing his heel against the drumhead to mute it or change the pitch. For Juba or related music, a second man, called the *catalier* (the one who *cata*), beats sticks against the body of the instrument behind the drummer.

In the northern part of Haiti one also finds the Zesse drum, used exclusively for the Zesse dance. It is cylindrical, about thirty inches high, and is played in an upright position. A wire is stretched across the goatskin head in the manner of a snare drum. Like all drums with goatskin heads, it is beaten with the naked hands. 184 534

A large two-headed drum called the *tymbale* is used as a work drum for labor societies and for processions, and in combination with other drums it sometimes appears in the Juba and secular Congo dances. The heads are mounted on hoops, which are held fast by lacing. The drum is carried by a rope slung over the shoulder or around the neck. Sometimes an assot striking board is affixed to the body of the drum. 534 [461] [535] [482]

A miniature copy of the tymbale is called a *tambourine*. It is used in carnival dances, notably the Mascaron. Carried by a cord which hangs around the neck, it is played with two diminutive sticks. Drumming is primarily a man's prerogative, but during carnival days women or girls may be seen playing the *tambourine*. [462]

In southwestern Haiti, and possibly elsewhere, special drums are used for the Manuba dance. The Manuba drum is about a foot long, cylindrical, and about five inches in diameter, with two drumheads held together with cords. A pair of these drums is joined by a rope about two feet long, which is hung around the neck so that the two drums are in convenient playing position on the chest. 184 534 535

Twin drums which are hung over the knee are known as *marassas*— 534 [192]
The Haitian word for "twins."

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[The Congo and Pétro Pantheons]

Wangol (King of Angola). He also appears in other rites.

Yaombé, or Mayombé. This name is a tribal designation, referring to the Mayaombés of the Congo region.

Wangol Dleau (Wangol of the Water)

Moundongue. Often considered to be a "hard" loa. Ritual service to him includes, on special occasions, the cutting off of dogs' ears and tails. He is fond of dogs and is benevolent toward them. The name derives from that of a tribe of the upper Congo region.

Ti Moundongue. Said to be a "son" of Moundongue.

Moundongue Moutaille. A member of Moundongue's family.

Baiacou, or Bèlécou. A loa identified with the morning star, also called Baiacou. There is also a town in Dahomey by this name.

Ganda, or Bagawda, also called Nzg' Ganda. A deity taking the name of the Ganda people of Uganda.

Congo Yamthogan. A benevolent loa associated with curing and protecting the sick. Certain curative medicine bundles are called *yamingans*.

Macaya Bumba, sometimes called Caya. He takes his name from the Bumba people of the upper Congo River region. The Bumbas are near neighbors of the Moundongues.

Manto Bumba. One of the Bumba family.

Mariani Moundongue. One of the Moundongue family.

Roi Loangue (King of Loango). Refers to the old African kingdom of that name.

Nanchiou. A warrior deity.

Avélékété. Known primarily in northern Haiti.

Dan Pétro. A rather malevolent loa, from whom the Pétro cult takes its name. The mangé for Dan Pétro is a pig. Early observers speculated that Dan Pétro was originally a powerful houngan of prerevolutionary days.[23]

Ayida-Pétro. A Pétro version of the Vodoun Ayida Wédo.

Bakulu Baka, known in some regions by the name Pinga Maza. He is a malevolent spirit who "eats"—i.e., destroys—people. Some informants are inclined to believe that Bakulu and Pinga are separate loa, both of a variety akin to baka or démons.

Bakulu Barak. Related to Bakulu Baka.

Barbarra Taiba. He is visualized as a sea crab. *Taille bas* in Creole means "low hips" and is used to describe a dance posture. The surname Taiba therefore may describe the movements of this loa as he moves about like a crab.

Bolisi Bolisa

Brisé Gérézal, or Gérézal Brisé. He is enormously large and ferocious in appearance. A special loa of the country people. Although stern, he is fond of children. He is symbolized as an owl; his home is in the chardette tree. His physical description suggests that he may be a deification of the epic folklore character Brise Montagne, or Break Mountains.

Chambaran

Congo Jiaoque (Congo Red Eyes). A malevolent male spirit. Loa with red eyes are always of bad character.

Congo Mayombe, or Mayombe. A malevolent spirit.

Congo Savane, or Congo Zanmo (Congo of the Plains). Malevolent, fierce, and

[23] [Saint-Méry, De la danse, p. 48. Cf. p. 354, Cat. 116.—Ed.]

2: Courlander B-8 (1937-1965) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

[P 340)

5. *Translations of Songs in Chapter 19*

533 539 Many of the Creole song texts included with the music in chapter 19 are translated and explained in earlier chapters. The following examples are translations of song texts in chapter 19 to which there is no reference elsewhere in the book.

EXAMPLE 133

Ézilie Wèdo, *ago*, oh!
The Creoles say like this,
I am not in Africa any more,
I shall do as I please!
The Creoles say like this,
I am not in Africa any more,
I shall do as I please, oh!
I being myself,
I take myself away,
I do what I please, oh!

[976] [992] (Ézilie Wèdo is the name of a loa. She boasts that she comes to Haiti and returns to Africa whenever she wishes. The word *ago* is exclamatory and means something like "I am here.")

EXAMPLE 134

The Forty Days [Lent], three women, three virgins,
Prayers for the saints, prayers for the walking saints!
Prayers for the loa Saint Antoine, oh, we ask your pardon!

EXAMPLE 135

In Africa are loa, oh!
Ève ève, hounsi kanzo!
Ève ève, hounsi kanzo!
In Africa are loa, *alobo!*

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Cousin, oh, cousin, oh,
Cousin, don't take cousin, oh, cousin!

(A *gourdain* is one-quarter of a gourde, or the equivalent of five cents in United States money. *Dé gourdain* is ten cents.)

EXAMPLE 141 consists entirely of ritual language.

EXAMPLE 142

Call Damballa, call Domici, call Damballa Wèdo,
Damballa, call Damballa Wèdo, Damballa.

(Damballa and Domici are the names of loa.)

EXAMPLE 143

Ibo, I am a big man, oh!
Ibo, I am a big man, oh!
Ibo, I am the patriarch, oh, I am the patriarch, oh,
I am the chief of my house!

(Ibo is the name of a loa, from whose point of view the song is being sung. Ibo is stating his seniority in his house, or family, for there are other loa related to him. The word *grand* in Creole, as used here, is difficult to translate. It means good or elder, or both. A *grand famille* is the oldest in the extended family, and usually carries the connotation of head or chief.)

EXAMPLE 144

Ibo Ibo é, Samardi Kama!
Etc.

(Samardi Kama is the name of a loa of the Ibo family. The song consists of a repetition of his name, with variations.)

EXAMPLE 145

Ibo Ibo é, Marianni é!
Etc., with variations.

(This is a song to the loa Marianni, of the Ibo family. Except for his name, in various combinations, there are no words.)

EXAMPLE 146 is a song for the making of magic. It is entirely in ritual language.

EXAMPLE 147

Call Osange, call Labosan in the water!
Osange, oh, call Osange in the water!
Osange, oh, call Osange in the water!

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(A song for the loa Osange. Literally, the song specifies Osange "in the water," but the sense is "under the water," where the loa reside.

EXAMPLE 148

Yabofé my dear, they don't need me!
I will see [enter through] the center post if they *djagwé*!
Yabofé my dear, they don't need me!
I will see the center post if they *djagwé*!
Ferei doesn't see me any more!
I will see the center post if they *djagwé*!

(Yabofé and Ferei are the names of loa. Even though addressed as "Yabofé my dear," it is Yabofé who is speaking. If one thinks of it as "Dear Yabofé says," the shifting point of view becomes less confusing. The term *djagwé* indicates a kind of tension and excitement which builds up before possessions take place. Yabofé says that if the people *djagwé* he is prepared to enter through the center post.)

EXAMPLE 149

Take me (to go), oh!
To the house, oh!

EXAMPLE 150

Damballa! Damballa!
Damballa Wèdo Damballa!
Damballa, *enhé*!
Sacred Damballa! Damballa!

(The song is an invocation to the loa Damballa. The word *enhé* is exclamatory.)

EXAMPLE 151

Ibo Lélé, oh!

(Ibo Lélé is the name of a loa.)

EXAMPLE 152

We thread our way [like a snake],
Damballa Wèdo is a snake, oh!

(The "threading" is a description of conventionalized dance movements suggesting the crawling of a snake. The loa Damballa is identified as a snake.)

EXAMPLE 153

Loko Sindé asks for wind, él

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 HaRi SV3

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Your share, *mayouse*!
Find your woman, *mayouse*!
Mayou-youse!

(*Paillette* means "all decorated up," "fancy," "in carnival regalia." It is also the name of a dance, as is *mayouse*, used here as an exclamation.) [192] [535]

EXAMPLE 168 was said to be in "Spanish."

EXAMPLE 169

Go to your mother's house,
Go to your mother's house,
Go to your mother's house, my dear,
Do not come and give me an argument!
Go to your mother's house, my dear,
Go to your mother's house, my dear,
Go to your mother's house, my dear,
And do not give me an argument!
Little girl who doesn't know how to wash and iron,
Go home to your mother,
Little girl who doesn't know how to wash and iron,
Go home to your mother!
Angelico, Angelico, go to your mother's house!
Angelico, Angelico, go to your mother's house!

EXAMPLE 172

Oh I'm not a mule,
Oh I'm not a mule, oh!
The farmer takes me to carry his coffee!

(A good-natured protest song of the kind often sung by coumbites.) [496]

EXAMPLE 173 has no text. It is exclamatory throughout.

EXAMPLE 174

Ê Laiza, where should I go, Laiza ê!
Laiza, the children are hypocrites, oh!
Etc.

EXAMPLE 175

Ewa Mambo Susan, I am cutting trees
To take away the honey!

EXAMPLE 176

Adieu kining kining kining,
Oh I say my prayer to God to send rain!

(The first line is ritual language, but it appears to have been originally a phrase recited by the prêt' savane.) [198]

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533
539 EXAMPLE 178

Osan, oh, Lèlè, oh!
Osan, ah, Lèlè, oh!
They take the asson of the loa and serve evil, oh!
Let it sink!

[626] (The song criticizes someone who has become a houngan and has used his
[976] powers wrongly. Osan Lèlè is the loa to whom the complaint is being addressed, or he may be the one lodging the complaint.)

EXAMPLE 179

Farmer, call the loa for me, *ago-é!*
Farmer, call the loa for me now,
Call the loa for me now,
Gèdé has engaged me!

[776] (Gèdé is a loa. *Habitant* signifies "farmer" or "peasant" but could be trans-
[792] lated as "countryman.")

EXAMPLE 180

Boulicha, I arrive,
See my misfortune!
I will cut them, I have no knife!
Boulicha Nago, I will cut them, *malovié!*

[776] (The loa Boulicha Nago announces his arrival and complains that people
[798] have mistreated him. He says he will avenge himself without a knife. *Malovié* is ritual language.)

EXAMPLE 181

I am going to see the hounsi bossale, oh,
I am going to see if they are in accord with me.
Etc.

EXAMPLE 182

I cry honor before my loa's altar,
Cry honor, and no one replies!
I cry honor before my loa's altar,
Cry honor, and no one replies!
All who speak well [of me], I am here, I will listen, oh!
All who speak evil [of me], I am here, I will listen to them!
They sign my name, Allada, but they do not sign my feet,
I ask where will they see me!

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Notes

Chapter 1: *The Making of the Haitian* (*pp. 1–7*)

[1]The name Ganda survives in Haiti as the name of a deity.

[2]Herskovits, in *The Myth of the Negro Past* (p. 47), provides a tabulation of raw data found in the manifests recorded for slaves shipped to Virginia between 1710 and 1769: 20,564 slaves were reported shipped from "Africa," 3,652 from Gambia, 6,777 from "Guinea," 9,224 from Calabar, 3,860 from Angola, and 1,011 from Madagascar. Of those shipped from the island of Madagascar, 473 were listed as coming from Mozambique.

[3]Bartolomé de Las Casas.

Chapter 2: *Man and the Universe: Vodoun* (*pp. 8–18*)

[1]See Courlander, *Haiti Singing*, p. 7.

[2]Schweinfurth in *The Heart of Africa*, II, 31, says: "In Loango all exorcists and conjurors are called *ganga*." Leo Wiener, in *Africa and the Discovery of America* (Philadelphia: Innes and Sons, 1922), III, 32, reports: "Forms of *ganga* have in Bantu the meaning 'medicine' but also 'magic'—such as Nyika *ganga* and Kongo *nganga*."

[3]Gorer, *Africa Dances*, p. 139; Herskovits, *Dahomey*, II, 208 ff.

[4]From the Fon *houn-so* or *houn-su*. Among the Arada of Dahomey a *houn-su* was regarded as a spiritual wife of the deity. She was a servant of the cult temple, and in some instances a wife of the cult priest.

[5]Translated from the French of Aubin, *En Haiti*, pp. 57–59.

[6]Deren, in her *Divine Horsemen* (pp. 119 ff.), gives an excellent report of a service for Agwé in a boat at sea. Aubin (*op. cit.*, p. 108) seems to have given the first description of this service at sea for the loa Agwé.

[7]Leyburn, *The Haitian People*, p. 119.

[8]*Ibid.*, p. 123. Leyburn advances the theory that Vodoun developed during this period as a result of the vacuum left by the Church. Although the Church did in effect leave the field to the African cults, one must assume that the Arada, Congo, and other cults were already organized and possessed of great vitality before the Haitian revolution. Implicit evidence points to a continuity of cult life from the earliest days of the African on Haitian soil. There are no statistics to reveal the extent of cult membership at the end of the eighteenth century, but the content and form of Vodoun today are so overwhelmingly African that it is difficult to think of Haitian cult activity as the product of a renaissance.

Chapter 3: *The Loa: Gods of the Haitian Mountains* (*pp. 19–39*)

[1]The term *vodoun*, used in this precise sense, conforms to the original Fon (Dahomean) usage. The term *hounsi*, also of Fon origin, signifies "spirit" and belongs to the same root

2: Courlander B-3 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

as *houngfor*, *houngi*, *houngénicon*, *hounsto*, etc. *Mystère* is of obvious French origin. *Loa* is probably from the Bantu, but it could be from the Yoruba.

[3]Various methods and formulas are employed in "tying" a loa. Sometimes making the sign of the cross is regarded as adequate, or the saying of a prayer. In "The Vodun Service in Northern Haiti" (*American Anthropologist*, XLII, 242–243), George Eaton Simpson reports that the "tying" of a loa sometimes results in a contest between the individual concerned and his houngan. If the houngan wants the *maît' tête* to come in, he must neutralize the ritual barriers the "horse" has put in the way. "One procedure for bringing on possession in a servant who has tried to 'tie' his chief god is for the priest to stand in front of the person whom he suspects, make the sign of the cross, and strike him on the forehead three times with a sacrificial stone. Usually these blows are hard enough to make blood spurt. The servant then begs the pardon of the angry god, and as soon as possible he unties the knots in his handkerchief [the method he has used for 'tying' his loa]."

[4]Herskovits, *Dahomey*.

Chapter 4: *Death Rites* (*pp. 30–40*)

[1]Maurice Delafosse, *L'Ame nègre*. Translation from *Free France*, special issue No. 4. French Press and Information Service, New York, June, 1945.

[2]Leo A. Verwilghen, in booklet describing peoples of the Kwango region, accompanying *Music of the Western Congo*, recordings issued by the Ethnic Folkways Library.

[3]Willoughby, *The Soul of the Bantu*, pp. 88–89.

[4]W. M. Eiselen and I. Schapera, "Religious Beliefs and Practices," in Schapera, *The Bantu-speaking Tribes of South Africa*, p. 250.

[5]Translated from the French of Aubin, *En Haïti*, p. 212.

[6]Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley*, pp. 213–214.

[7]Hall and others, *Haitian Creole*, American Anthropological Association, Memoir No. 54, pp. 188–189.

[8]Simpson, "Four Vodun Ceremonies," *Journal of American Folklore*, April–June, 1946, pp. 155–162.

[9]As translated by Courlander from Simpson's Creole text, *ibid.*, p. 156. The preceding paragraph is from p. 155.

[10]Translated by Courlander from the Creole of Simpson's text.

[11]This and the preceding paragraph are from Simpson, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

[12]These shells, as indicated elsewhere, are part of the paraphernalia of the Vodoun priest and appear to be an inheritance from the priests of the Fa cult of Dahomey. The divining shells are usually thrown on the ground in fours, and the readings depend upon combinations of "heads and tails." The manner of throwing the shells, as well as the number used, corresponds closely with the Haitian secular gambling game *mayombe* (see Appendix 2), though the purpose is obviously different. In some priestly rites in Haiti, ashes rather than the customary shells are used for divining.

[13]Simpson, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

[14]*Ibid.*, p. 161.

[15]Herskovits, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

[16]Herskovits (*ibid.*) notes that persons who die of smallpox, lightning, and certain other phenomena are not buried in coffins. Some of my informants indicated this to be their understanding also, but they said that the dead are buried without coffins for strictly economic reasons as well.

[17]Simpson, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

[18]Leyburn, *The Haitian People*, p. 156.

[19]Herskovits, *Dahomey*, I, 398.

[20]*Ibid.*, pp. 307–308.

[21]Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley*, p. 214.

[22]Hall and others, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

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to command the forced labor of serfs, had to develop a new technique for securing manual labor. Legislation soon recognized the new state of affairs by enactments which kept distinct *la grande culture* and *la petite culture*. The former had to do with the production of sugar and coffee, from which the republic derived its wealth; the latter with small farming. *La petite culture* was simple cultivation of whatever the small owner wished to raise. Large-scale culture, on the other hand, became rather complicated.

Owners of great estates had to guide them only their experience of slave days and of serfdom under Toussaint and Dessalines. Now that both were gone, few planters were wealthy enough to pay wages for day labor; a new variation was needed. It was forthcoming in the *métayer* system—a crop-sharing arrangement with tenants closely resembling that which prevails today in some parts of the United States. The owner leased his estate in large or small plots to tenants. Half the income went to the landlord and half to the tenant; but the landlord must furnish the sugar mill and other necessary machinery where cane was raised. Laws were passed to give a measure of security to the proprietor. The contract between him and the tenant (*fermier*)[26] must be signed before a civil official; the engagement must extend through the harvesting of one crop; tenants even then might not abandon their contracts except after notice of three months, with a declaration to the local official.

Punishments were stipulated for the breaking of contracts. A tenant who had made an agreement and then abandoned the *habitation*, even for a visit elsewhere, without a certificate attesting his regularity, might be imprisoned for eight days the first time, a month the second, and three months the third, such imprisonment to be spent in hard labor on public works. Any disputes arising between plantation owners and tenants were to be taken before the local justice. If they threatened to develop into serious cases, the justice was to notify the commandant of the nearest important town. A person who fomented disturbance of such agreements (the Haitian equivalent of "labor agitators," style 1810) might be imprisoned for a year, as also his accomplices. Commandants of each arrondissement must put down disorder as soon as requested by landlords, tenant farmers, or overseers. They must likewise make frequent patrols of

26. The word "fermier" must not be translated simply as "farmer"; the idea of a contract and a rental fee is implicit in the French word.

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175 566 671 24 [943] [846] [527] A cultivator who loafs on his assigned job shall spend twenty-four hours in jail for his first offense and lose his wages; for a second offense he must work on public projects. Field labor shall be regularly carried on from Monday morning until Friday evening, except for legal holidays; work begins at dawn, continues except for a half-hour at breakfast until noon, stops then for two hours, and is once more resumed until sunset. Pregnant females are to be assigned to light work only, and after the fourth month of pregnancy need do no field work. Four months after delivery, a mother is to return to field work, but with three hours a day less than before, until she has weaned her child. Disobedience and insult to overseers are punishable by imprisonment. Since Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays are free, there is to be no dancing or any other festivity by night or day from Monday through Friday.

175 671 913 24 On each estate is to be a hierarchy of directors, all of whom the workers shall obey. In ascending order, these men are drivers (or squad foremen),[40] jobbers, sublessees, lessees, proprietors and managers, overseers of districts, and police.

175 715 24 In establishing a system of remuneration Boyer kept the accustomed method of allotting a proportion of the marketed crop to the workers in lieu of hourly or daily wages. In any season from a quarter to a half of the gross receipts of the estates was to go to the laborers, the exact proportion in any year to be determined by the government. It was assumed by Boyer and Inginac that there would be an added inducement to work if the laborers' share were distributed not equally, but rather in proportion to the merit and worth of the individual, these evaluations to be made by the recommendation of overseers.

175 692 24 Enforcement of the Code was placed in the hands of local justices and the army. Soldiers were to be assigned to each plantation, receiving their living from it, in return preserving order and routine. Although the whip was once more prohibited, steady labor might still be enforced by other means; the law definitely stated that soldiers were to discipline the lazy, the lawless, and the vagrant. Local justices were to deal with any civil difficulties arising in the execution

[192] 40. The word "driver" was commonly used in West Indian slave colonies with no other meaning than that attached to the word when one speaks of a man "driving" his horses. It is not necessary to beat a horse to make it go properly; a word of direction may suffice.

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175 563 564 [19] ions. Intermarriages between persons of widely different color became extremely rare, being regarded by many lighter Haitians with actual disgust. Everyone with social pretensions wanted to be whiter. Dr. Brown stated it baldly: "The pure negro seeks to ally himself to the griffe,[59] the griffe to the mulatto, the mulatto to the quateroon, the latter to a mustif, and the mustif, having but an untraceable tinge of African blood in his organization, is uproariously indignant if he is accused of having any at all."[60] An educated young black of several generations of free parents was scornfully turned down by a lighter-skinned woman considerably his inferior in breeding and wealth because her children would be darker than herself—"*petits enfants griffes*," as she put it. The prejudices of colored people against blacks was almost as great, if not quite as intense, as the former prejudice of whites against colored people in colonial times. No one forgot that there had been black as well as colored freedmen in the colony; but it was much simpler for people of color to claim their long career as élite than for blacks to do so.

The attitude of upper-class Haitians toward whites in the midst of all this color prejudice was an interesting mixture. On the one hand, all good Haitians professed to dread a return of the whites; on the other, they welcomed white businessmen in the country. In a certain respect the whites were regarded much as were the Jews of Europe [673] in the Middle Ages: they were wealthy—and therefore legitimate objects of pillage, necessary evils for the sake of finance. Theft from a [671] white man by government action was a service to the state. Laws [641] were consequently varied from time to time with the sole purpose of profiting from a foreigner's position. True, the trader might protest [423] to his home government, but if England or the United States took a strong stand, Haiti could always retreat; if those governments did not stand firm, Haiti had gained. In the Haitian courts the whites had little show, for Article 38 of the Constitution forbade them to own real estate or to become citizens; they might not even hold a lease for more than ten years; and they might not marry Haitian women.

Nevertheless, the analogy with mediaeval Jews falls down at one vital point: whites were not viewed with contempt. Quite the con-

[192] 59. A term denoting three parts in four of Negro blood. This term as well as "mustif" goes back to colonial white society; neither was, or is, used by cultivated Haitians.

60. Brown, *op. cit.*, II, 283–284.

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believe. It stuck in people's minds. Since Sir Spenser's time tourists to Haiti have habitually spent a few hours ashore, heard drumbeats from the hills, and shuddered deliciously as they conjured up images of weird goings-on—black magic, licentious dances, and frenetic orgies. Novelists during the past half-century have spun their tales full of local color, while "serious" authors have made small fortunes out of pseudo-scientific books with just enough fact mingled with their lush imaginings to give "an air of similitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative." Their language runs into such purple phrases as "blood-maddened, sex-maddened, god-maddened,"[1] to describe the religious exaltation of the people at a Vodun service. Under this constant rain of misrepresentation, Haitians who care for the good opinion of other nations have become extremely sensitive on the subject of the folk religion. Many of them deny its existence; others speak of it as something beneath their attention. The more they try to cover it over, however, with silence and professed contempt, the more mysteriously fascinating it becomes to the foreign visitor. The tourist who goes to Paris expects to see the Eiffel Tower, whatever its aesthetic faults; the tourist in Haiti wishes to see, without quite knowing what he means by the term, "a Voodoo dance." No amount of scientific writing about the real character of Vodun will change the popular misconception. For every reader of accurate ethnographical or anthropological treatises on Vodun[2] there are hundreds who feast morbidly on sensational books.

Haitian Vodun is not the same as the hoodoo of American Negroes.[3] The word is etymologically the same, whether American Voodoo, Haitian Vodun, French Vaudoux, or Spanish judu (whence our "hoodoo"): all derive from a Dahomean (West African) word signifying "god" or "spirit."[4] It is the generic term for all deities.

1. This phrase is taken from W. B. Seabrook, *The Magic Island* (New York, 1929), p. 42, but might easily have come from half a dozen other journalistic descriptions.

2. Particularly recommended are Melville J. Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley* (New York, 1937), and Dr. Jean Price-Mars, *Ainsi parla l'oncle* (Port-au-Prince, 1928).

3. See Herskovits, *op. cit.*, pp. 139 ff.

4. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, in a surprisingly superficial and brief article, gives a singular etymology to "Voodoo," tracing it to the Swiss canton of Vaud, where in the Middle Ages a heterodox faith sprang up which had to be practiced in secret. The implication is that any secret religion might be called "Vaud-ois," or "Voodoo." Evidently the author of the encyclopaedia article had made no serious investigation of the subject; most modern dictionaries, on the other hand, indicate the Dahomean etymology.

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learn the properties of plants, both for healing and for poison. Except for the belief in spiritual beings, this folk knowledge would hardly have been classed as religious, for it was useful in every phase of daily life; the classification is that of the anthropologist, not of the simple black.

If Dahomean beliefs prevailed over others of African origin, it was chiefly because of the numerical preponderance of Dahomeans in the colony, together with the popularity of their religious dances. The Dahomean spirits or gods were Vodun; the dance in which the worshiper sought the inspiration of the spirits was a Vodun dance. Like all but the highly organized religions, this one recognized the validity of other beliefs. Its practitioners were not bigots. No hierarchy existed to keep out new accretions. Imperceptibly these were added to the original basic form: here an Arada spirit, there a Congolese prayer, and in many instances a Catholic saint, until the composite Vodun religion began to take shape.

There is no evidence that during colonial times Vodun was ever considered important by the white ruling class—certainly not as a faith. To most planters the word was the name for a vigorous dance. Judging from Moreau de Saint-Méry's description it was held openly enough, at times being witnessed by the whites as a sort of nocturnal diversion. Moreau knew, as did other whites, that there were "superstitious beliefs" connected with it, yet the offhand use of the word "superstition" was indication enough that the beliefs were not regarded as important. We have seen, however, what profitable use the slaves were able to make of the apparent innocence of their dances. When the idea of revolt began to germinate among them, gathering on each plantation at least once a week they had ample opportunity to hatch their plans. It is known that the campaign for revolt was developed partly under the stimulus of the Negro Boukman, a *houngan* or priest of Vodun. By means of drumbeats, which to the whites merely pounded out the rhythm for dancing but had for centuries been a means of communication at long distance in parts of West Africa, that ripening plot was telegraphed from one plantation to another. Even more important, perhaps, was the unity of feeling made possible, despite all incoherence of tradition and language, by the Vodun background.

The revolt of half a million slaves was a success. This fact has been rather too calmly accepted by historians of Saint-Domingue, who

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A gentle spirit may cause great harm to a person who neglects his commands, while a spirit whose power makes possible the most malignant magic may bring good fortune to his devotee. By conceiving his spirits as in manner and desires resembling himself, the Haitian can understand his little universe without subjecting himself to the bewilderment which faces a simple Christian trying to reconcile an all-loving Father with the obvious evil He allows on earth.

One must approach Vodun without the religious preconceptions of Christianity or Judaism. Suspending our notions of orthodoxy, monotheism, sin, heaven, and hell, we may examine more closely the creed suggested above, in an endeavor to round out its real meaning to the Haitian.

"I believe in gods and spirits . . ." The white man would recognize most easily among the Haitian's multiple gods the God of Christianity whom every Vodun worshiper confesses. It is this God who is meant in the homely expression of native acceptance of one's lot: "*Bon Dieu bon*"—the good God is really good, however remote. Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are likewise acknowledged, although it seems probable that they do not touch the hearts of people as much as the Great Master. The Blessed Virgin, on the other hand, is very real and near—so real, in fact, that she is sometimes actually merged with a spirit of African origin who has many of the Virgin's storied characteristics. Certain angels and a select group of Christian saints have made a special appeal and so found their niche in Vodun; others are not denied but merely ignored because the Haitian is not well acquainted with them.

To the spirits (one hesitates to use such misleading words as "gods" or "divinities") not drawn from Christianity the name "loa" is applied. There seem in general to be two classes of these: those who have an African origin, and those with a Haitian background only. The former group is called "Rada," the latter "Pétro." The word Rada is derived from the principality of Allada in Dahomey, and would seem thus to indicate that all the Rada loa were Dahomean; this, however, is definitely not the case. Numerous loa can be traced to the Congo region and others to the smaller West African districts, yet all of these are indiscriminately called Rada. In current usage, accordingly, the word has lost its strict geographical significance. The term Pétro is explained in an illuminating paragraph by the Haitian savant, Dr. Dorsainvil:

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The language of possession is descriptive. When a god seizes a man, he "mounts" him; the possessed person forthwith becomes the god's "horse." The words are accurate, for the god seems to have as much control over his mount as a human rider would have over a horse whose will he dominates. The person mounted does nothing of his own accord while he is possessed. Under the invisible whip of the spirit-rider the "horse" does a great many things, and says even more, that would be unnatural or even impossible to him, unridden.[26]

Possession is more than the affair of a moment. In this respect it differs again from kindred seizures known to whites. A person may have to wait for many years before he is finally mounted, but the first loa who descends upon him is the chief of his deities, taking precedence over any other who might subsequently possess him. The initial seizure is a vitally important experience, corresponding roughly to the conversion or confirmation of persons in other religions. The subject is carefully observed by experts, so that no mistake will be made in the deductions from actions and speech as to the identity of the god. This loa is baptized by sprinkling water on the head of the possessed person. Thereafter the loa is called "*maît' tête*," as a recognition of the subservience of his mount: any agreement the devotee might make with another loa under a particular possession would have to conform to the initial agreement with the maît' tête. At a man's death the loa, which has, like more than a guardian angel, accompanied him through life, is taken from his head so that the man's soul may go to God—the Christian God.[27]

The possessing god may be either male or female. It frequently happens that a male loa mounts a female devotee, in which case she is addressed by a male name, wears male clothes, eats and drinks the things her loa prefers (no matter how distasteful to her ordinarily), and otherwise manifests his characteristics. This extraordinary change of personality is accepted naturally enough by the other participants in the rites, although the transformation is to foreigners a psychological phenomenon of prime interest. Dr. Dorsainvil devotes a book to the neuroses connected with possession; as he says: "One of the first consequences of the Vodoun crisis is the substitution for the

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26. Zora Neale Hurston, in her gaily written *Tell My Horse* (Philadelphia, 1938), has a vivid chapter on the possession effected by the distinctly Haitian loa, Guédé. She entitles this chapter in Creole: "*Parlay cheval ou*" (Tell my horse)—the words with which the loa begins to dictate through the mouth of his mount. See pp. 232–250.

27. See Herskovits, *op. cit.*, pp. 146–151.

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Worship of the loa is directed by priests and priestesses. They grow into their positions by a kind of tolerant apprenticeship. Young men and women discover their abilities in dealing with loa or their desire to participate actively in serving them; they assist the officiating priests; they listen carefully to the lore of their elders, keeping their eyes open meanwhile. The priest is generally called a houngan, or sometimes a *papaloi;* the priestess a *mambu* or a *manalai.*[33] No ceremony marks the progression of a novice through any set stages to final priesthood; rather, the people in the community simply recognize growing experness. The more effective and capable a houngan, the greater his prestige and the wider his reputation. There is nothing even vaguely resembling the ordered hierarchy of priests in the Catholic Church, nor is there any control of one houngan over another. No holy robes adorn the officiants, although they occasionally wear certain colors or ornaments to please the loa. Most of the Vodun priests and priestesses are simple peasants, working in the fields and going about the daily round of life. When they are called to perform a ritual, an offering is taken up in the early part of the service to recompense them for their offices.

Actually, the Vodun houngan and mambu correspond much more closely to the primitive medicine man or shaman than to the Catholic priest. They are thought to have power, through certain Rada and Pétro loa, to cure illnesses caused either by adverse magic of one's enemies or by a loa; they are not able, however, to cure sickness sent by the Christian God. Likewise they can remedy or avert misfortune whose origin is magic or the loa. One of their highly important functions is foretelling the future: no important service would be contemplated by a family without previous resort to divination to determine the propitiousness of the time, nor would it be sensible to undertake a secular business of importance without preliminary reassurance by this means. To see into the future effectively, the priest must be possessed by the loa.[34]

33. The second of these names in each case derives from "papa" and "mama," or master and mistress; and from the familiar loa or god. It is not implied that the officiants dominate the loa but only that they deal expertly with them.

34. In addition to the houngans and mambus, there are also bokors who specialize in magic without conducting regular religious rites. These bokors probably deserve the name of sorcerers.

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789 generally through no wish of their own, have the uncanny ability to cause evil simply by a glance. One look is enough to do the damage. Although theory is a bit vague on this point, it appears that certain irritable spirits use the agency of the human eye to vent their spleen on mortals who are fortunate: good looks and strokes of luck act, consequently, as lodestones to the fateful glance. And where the [175] glance falls ill luck may spread, harming all within reach. In the days [304] of slavery people had such a fear of the evil eye that they did not hesitate to disfigure infants who at birth seemed to be particularly handsome and so likely to attract attention. Nowadays the practice 777 is to avert the glance by making an *arrêt*. This "halt" may be either a 789 special charm worn on the person or else the mark of a half-moon done with a caustic vegetable substance on the cheek. As with Europeans who believe in the evil eye, certain specialists ply a lucrative trade through their reputation for effective charms against the malocque.

Other charms may be mentioned. There is the *garde* which protects its wearer against evil of any variety—the near relative of the good-luck charm worn by thousands of "civilized" people. There is the *ouanga*, or *wanga*, compounded to achieve a special end, generally an evil one. Faine remarks that ouanga is

• [92] A Créole word of African origin [signifying] a philtre or simple of a special kind, compounded by an *houngan* out of such diverse ingredients as a dead chicken, some grains of indigo and maize, amulets, pieces of money, asafoetida, etc., the whole contained in a half-calabash. . . . The Ouanga, placed in the home of an enemy, is designed to bring him bad luck even to the extent of giving him elephantiasis ("gros pied") when he has inadvertently stepped on the ouanga.[77]

The ouanga is the Haitian equivalent of the hoodoo, for through its influence one may (or so he believes) bring illness, misfortune, or death to an enemy. For every ouanga there is a garde, for every evil a cure. The art lies in finding out the nature of the ouanga causing harm, and then knowing exactly what to do to fend it off.

751 Historically the most interesting garde is that called a *drogue*,
789 which is thought to insulate one against wound by weapons or bullets. Reference has already been made to the utter abandon with which the Negroes, both at the time of the insurrection and later in

77. Jules Faine, *Philologie Créole* (Port-au-Prince, 1937), p. 329.

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generally believed that the compact always results fatally for the man who makes it, why anyone should enter into such an engagement. Craving for money or some other immediate form of power, however, belies the reason; in the face of all-consuming desire, more than one man has been willing to ignore future pain for present reward.

It would be possible to conjure up a whole phantasmagoria of weird belief in connection with magic, although this would be unjust to the character of the Haitians. These people have their share of dire concepts, but no more than might be expected of a simple folk. One final magical belief must be treated, however, for it has reached the ears of the outside world in grim detail. This is the belief in the *zombi*. The word, as Faine explains, comes from the Bonda language of Africa (*zombi* there), and was probably transmitted to Haiti by Portuguese slave traders. Faine continues:

> Zombi . . . designates in general a revenant, a phantom, an otherworldly spirit. In popular belief, certain sorcerers have the power, by means of charms and spells, to cause apparent death to individuals and then to bring them back to life again, even after they have been buried. These resuscitated persons, only half-conscious, are then, isolated in distant parts of the country, utilized for field work. Nourished on food from which salt is rigorously excluded, they are thought to be able to regain their natural senses and all their mental faculties if they taste the least grain of this substance. Such legends, circumstantially garbed and presented as actual facts by certain unscrupulous authors, have served as the theme of books which have made a great commotion in foreign countries. Taking advantage of the credulity of a public avid for exotic matters, for mysteries, for the supernatural, these writers have gained, in certain cases, the greatest success of publicity.[2]

Three attitudes are taken in regard to the zombi. There are skeptics who deny the existence of zombis altogether, setting down as fable most of the ideas current about them, and as mistaken diagnosis all the remainder. There are the credulous (including practically every peasant) who believe in and quite directly fear this potential fate. And there are those who believe that certain bocors know how to administer a subtle poison to intended victims which will cause suspended animation and give the appearance of death. Men in the prime of life suddenly sicken and die for no apparent reason. Once these pseudo-corpses are safely buried, the sinister person who has

2. *Ibid.*, p. 305.

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565 771 ing since 1860 has had its effect upon the children of the upper classes. Two hundred churchmen working with a population of more than two million cannot distribute their benefits equally. Teachers must devote themselves to those whose minds are educable, who have access to schools, and who can afford time for daily classes. An element of social snobbishness entered as well. Catholicism was socially accepted in the Western World whose approval the élite coveted, where Vodun if known at all was regarded as a mere superstition. To prove his separation from the peasant black, the élite person was therefore Catholic or nothing.

[797] It would have required many times two hundred teaching brothers and sisters, all with the zeal of fanatics and the energy of dynamos, to convert the masses away from Vodun. In acquainting the peasants with Church forms and certain beliefs the priests have been entirely successful; in making exclusive Catholics of them they have had no success at all.

771 177 Every vital social institution is continually in a process of change. Vodun, a very living faith, has steadily borrowed more and more from Catholicism, the only other religion with which the people come in close contact. When one can go from a Saturday night Vodun sacrifice and dance to a Sunday morning Catholic Mass with no feeling of incongruity, it is obvious that the minds of the worshipers are actively predisposed to assimilation of creed and ritual.

796 We have suggested in a previous chapter some traces of the Catholic Mass in Vodun ceremony. The Vodun service regularly begins with a long ritual which the observer who knows both the Créole language and the Catholic liturgy recognizes as being almost entirely Roman. While the Vodun houngan sits quietly by, a special officiant known as the *prêt' savanne* (bush priest) reads or pretends to read from the Catholic prayer book. For the Pater Noster, the creed, the Ave Maria, the Salve Regina, and the prayers, the worshipers kneel or stand as they would in church. Candles burn, water is sprinkled, the sign of the cross is made, the chants are sung. When the benediction completes this part of the service, the houngan takes over to conduct the purely African rites; yet his first words are, "*Grâce mise'-corde,*" and many Catholic interpolations appear even in this second part of the service.

[778] [192] The Vodun ritual is conducted before an altar, in Haitian Créole called a "trône," which is a perfect marriage between Vodun and

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Catholicism. I have seen such an altar, with its adjacent table, bearing a crucifix, candles, (holy) water, lithographs of the "Assumption of the Virgin," "St. George and the Dragon," the "Adoration of the Kings," and certain unrecognized but distinctly European saints; in addition to these objects, however, were such unecclesiastical articles as bananas, rice, beans, squash, various bottles of drinks, and plates of food. Near by were the sacrificial animals.

Vodun makes use frequently of one sacrament of the Church—baptism. Needless to say, this rite is not a monopoly of Christianity, and its use in the folk religion may very well have come from Africa. Constant witnessing of the rite in church must nevertheless have influenced its adoption for all important Vodun ceremonials. The drums used in the dance are baptized; so also is the first loa to possess a devotee; at many other special times the rite is likewise performed, generally with a set of prayers which invoke Catholic saints and Vodun loa alike.

Mention has already been made of the identification of Rada and Pétro loa with certain saints and martyrs of the Church. Such identifications are not uniform, but vary in different parts of the country. Legba is generally associated with Saint Anthony, but often (and to the Christian, more understandably) with Saint Peter who traditionally guards the gates of heaven; the Virgin Mary quite obviously is related, whether as Queen of Heaven, as the Sorrowing Mother, or as the innocent Virgin, with numerous manifestations of Maîtresse Erzulie; Damballa, whose symbol is the serpent, is sometimes Moses (whose brother's rod became a serpent consuming other serpents, and who by lifting up a serpent in the wilderness cured the people of their snake bites) and sometimes Saint Patrick (whose association with snakes is well known). Other identifications are numerous, showing the penchant of the people for combining what they know of both religions.[1]

Many of the loa have, like the Catholic saints, their symbols, their special days, colors, and other associations. Some like white, some red; the serpent, the rainbow, the crossroads are among the symbols; sacred days occur weekly, Tuesday being Legba's, Wednesday Ogun's, Friday Erzulie's, and Saturday Baron Samedi's. It may be

1. The distinguished Haitian ethnographer, sociologist, and historian, Dr. Jean Price-Mars, has made a list of some of these identifications in his *Ainsi parla l'oncle*, pp. 180–182.

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have been gathered from trees which grew wild. Both men and women labor, with the work divided according to regular custom between the sexes, the men dominating the scene only in the marketing of coffee.

Nature was opulent enough at the beginning of Haitian independence. The wars had ruined irrigation ditches, sugar refineries, and mechanical equipment, but the soil was still abundantly fertile. But generations of farming by people without knowledge of fertilization or soil conservation have worn out much of the land. Trees have been cut to provide lumber and clearings for more farms; in the rainy seasons torrents have coursed down the mountainsides, washing away soil and exposing the earth to the rays of a tropical sun. Because the country is overpopulated every available acre is put to use, and to overuse, thus still more depleting the land. It is a vicious circle, for the next generation must extract yet more from the earth and so weaken it further. Hard work is the lot of the peasant, therefore, during every month of the year except the dry season. There has never been a formal rotation of crops: a farmer continues to plant the same crop in the same field until the harvest is perceptibly smaller than before. Then he changes to another type of produce. Sooner or later he will allow the land to lie fallow for several years until, by the action of nature or the grazing over it of cattle, it has regained a measure of its fertility.

The strenuous work of clearing fields and preparing them for cultivation is man's job. Since the peasants owned their plots it has almost always been done in coöperation by the men of the neighborhood. What on the American frontier would have been called a "bee" is known in Haiti as a *coumbite*, or *combite*, often carried on as an enterprise of the local *Société Congo*, the informal neighborhood group for mutual aid and fellowship.[6]

A man who has a large job on hand announces a coumbite for any day except Sunday, always a day of rest, and whatever other week-

6. The word "coumbite" was apparently borrowed from the Spanish part of the island, and from the Spanish word *convidar*, convey. In Colombia "convite" means exactly what "coumbite" means in Haiti: a gathering of peasants to work in common, or else a coöperative society for mutual agricultural self-help.

Professor Herskovits (*Life in a Haitian Valley*, chap. IV) describes the Société Congo in detail. The use of the name "Congo" indicates the African tradition, and is particularly noteworthy in connection with a kind of coöperative work which Herskovits finds particularly Dahomean.

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197 a language into their daily speech. What the Americans have done to English, the Haitians in general have done to Créole. It is pertinent briefly to review the early history of Créole in order to comprehend the distinctly Haitian contributions to the language.

175 579 Through most of the seventeenth century Caribbean waters were full of pirates and buccaneers preying upon Spanish shipping. The effective monopoly which lordly Spain held in the preceding century over the trade of Europe with her rich Mexican and South American colonies began, in the early years of the new century, to crumble before the ingenious, speedy, and daring assaults of non-Spanish raiders. French, Dutch, and English sailors were all ready to try their hand at capturing laden Spanish ships. The rich cargoes of gold, silver, and merchandise were alluring enough to make the risk seem worth taking. And indeed the risk was not too great, for Spain's stately galleons were antiquated and cumbersome, generally no match for the flyboats[1] which had speed and much greater manageability. More and more Spanish control over the Caribbean, the Spanish Main, declined as the freebooters increased.

175 579 648 French sailors were among the most numerous and reckless of the gadflies who made life miserable for the Spanish traders. Drawn from the northern and northwestern provinces of France, these men had been seafarers all their lives. Harrying Spanish shipping was the most lucrative career for French sailors, and as the seventeenth century wore on their numbers in the Caribbean increased. By 1660 they had established a raiding base on La Tortue, an island off the northern coast of Haiti, where they developed a characteristic way of life —economic, political, and social—between raids.[2] Their presence near Haiti gave France a claim, in the Treaty of Ryswick (1697), to the western part of the island. For the next hundred years this region was to be known as Saint-Domingue.

175 579 197 Créole was born of buccaneering. In the seventeenth century the French of Île-de-France had not yet supplanted the dialects of the French districts; the buccaneers consequently spoke their native speech, and since Norman sailors far outnumbered the others

[175] [192] 1. Origin of "flibustier," "filibuster," and "freebooter."

2. It was here that they came to be called "buccaneers." They raided the relatively deserted main island of Haiti (then still under Spanish control) for cattle roaming wild. These cattle they cooked over an open fire, with a certain kind of wood; the process was called "boucanning," and they themselves "boucaniers." They imported wives from the seaport towns of Normandy, and families began to be raised on La Tortue.

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Norman French became the dominant tongue of the French buccaneers. Words were naturally added from the patois of the neighboring French provinces of Picardy, Brittany, and Anjou, but Norman remained the matrix.[3] With La Tortue as their home base, the buccaneers roamed the Caribbean, coming into constant contact with other people—contact which left its mark, as meetings generally do, upon the speech of the travelers.

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There were still Indians left in some of the islands, and Indians outnumbered Spaniards on the mainland. From these aborigines Créole borrowed many individual words, these being generally the names of things—flora and fauna, food, objects of daily life more or less common throughout the Caribbean world.[4] The grammatical contributions of the Indians were apparently only an emphasis upon tendencies already present in Norman French, such as that of keeping the verb form constant while making other words in the sentence do the work of indicating past, present, or future, continuous or completed action, and the like.

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Engaged in buccaneering with the French were hundreds of English privateers. Often English and French raided in partnership; for many years both groups shared La Tortue. This contact left a heavy mark upon Créole—a congenial one, indeed, for Norman French had been for more than four centuries the official language of England. Now in the seventeenth century English was giving back to Norman many words in exchange for the ones it had taken.[5] More important than its verbal gift, however, was the influence it exerted toward a simple syntax. As compared with French forms,

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3. An outstanding linguist, Jules Faine, in *Philologie créole*, p. 1, estimates that three out of four words in Créole are Norman.

4. A very few of these Indian words have become familiar in French, and still fewer in English; but one finds most of them, in one form or another, in the whole Caribbean basin. Examples are:

agouti, a small rodent
alouton, a dish whose base is corn
caiman, alligator
iguane, a large lizard
avocat, the avocado pear
calebasse, calabash
corossol, a green prickly fruit
gouyave, guava
igname, yam
hamac, hammock
ouragan, hurricane
bayahonde, a very hard wood
campêche, another hard wood
mabouya, small lizard
barbaco, barbecue
cassava, a starch plant
lambi, a mollusk or conch
tom-tom, a purée of bananas

5. Henry Moiry, *Glossaire comparatif Anglo-Normand* (Caen, 1888), points out that the modern Norman dialect contains more than 5,000 words common to English and Norman, but not recognized in official French.

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Norman ones were less complicated; English, simpler still, reënforced the Norman tendency.

From the Spaniards of the Caribbean region Créole borrowed not only nouns (generally the most assimilable of words), but a large number of adjectives, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, and certain subtler characteristics of speech.

This amalgam, then, three quarters Norman French, was the Créole language as of 1697 when France acquired Saint-Domingue, when buccaneering became unprofitable, and many of the filibusters settled down to begin a respectable life as plantation owners in the new colony. African slaves were soon imported to satisfy the demand for labor. First a few, then thousands a year and increasing thousands, were brought to Saint-Domingue. In all externalities, of which language is one, slaves must yield up their old ways and take on new. The question of interest here is to what extent the Negroes influenced Créole, giving it an "African" character.

The answer, surprising at first, is that the Negro influence was almost negligible.

In the first place, Créole was now already a language with a rich vocabulary, all the grammatical equipment, and the necessary regularities. The slaves came to the colony from all parts of Africa, and so with widely differing languages. Linguistic maps of Africa indicate the presence of hundreds of dialects up and down the west coast; tribes living fifteen miles apart spoke languages which, although belonging to the same stock, were as different as Spanish and Italian from each other. Owing to the habit of dispersing the slaves, the average Negro had no common basis of understanding with his fellow slaves on the same plantation. Practically all white foremen and overseers gave orders in Créole; this within one generation became the *lingua franca* of the plantations, an economic necessity, and socially indispensable.

In the second place, there was in Saint-Domingue no equivalent to the familiar objects of life in Africa. Trees, houses, earth there were, of course, but different kinds of trees, houses, and soil. Economic tasks were performed in a different manner with new techniques and organization. Every outward form of life was foreign to the African background. Even assuming that there had been a common Negro speech, it would have found little to attach itself to in the New World. It should be noted that Negroes likewise made few contribu-

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tions to the English language in the southern United States, where they were slaves for seventy years longer than in Haiti.

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Common African economic ways yielded to the plantation system and slavery; the Negroes had no opportunity to govern themselves or settle their own disputes; they mated rather than married; their families might be broken up if the master wished to sell a slave. The one part of life in which they were permitted to follow unhindered their African ways was the intimate one of religion which, since it needed no buildings or organization, did not interfere with work, and could be entirely personal and private, was not suppressed. As has been pointed out, the Dahomean form of religion prevailed over all others and, modified, gained wide adherence among the slaves. It is precisely in Vodun that Créole has taken over its only important African words, such as Vodun, zombi, houngan, marassa, loa, houmfort, bocor, ouanga.

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It would be erroneous to imply that the Negroes had no effect upon the language of which they soon became the predominant users.[6] Their operations were of a subtle sort, however. As with the Negroes of the United States, the letter "r" proved difficult, and often disappeared altogether, leaving many words softly slurred. "Marcher," for example, generally sounds as if it were *ma'ché*. Likewise in the course of years they gave the language their own accent, their own modulation and tone, which make Créole sound different on their lips from a white man's way of speaking it. Some scholars attribute this to a *racial* influence—that is, to the morphology of the Negro throat and tongue. It might be pointed out to the contrary that Americans, white like the English, have given the mother tongue *their* own accent, modulation, and tone. It has certainly not yet been proved that race has anything to do with speech.

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Words in imitation of a sound grow up in every language. Several western African dialects, especially Mandingue, seemed fond of onomatopoeia; in Haiti, consequently, one hears many an expressive additional word. Moreau de Saint-Méry[7] noticed this in colonial Saint-Domingue, citing such cases as the addition of "*bap*" to the verb "*tomber*," if one had fallen down lightly, or "*boum*" if heavily;

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6. Suzanne Sylvain, *Le Créole haïtien* (Wetteren, Belgium, 1936), p. 10, says that although the African contribution to Haitian Créole is generally considered to be slight, she has personally found 170 words of undeniable African origin, and feels sure that there are many more.

7. *Description . . . de . . . Saint-Domingue*, II, 36–37.

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175 192 if a blow were given on the face the word "*pimme*" was added to the verb describing that blow, but if a stick had been used, "*bimme*" was added, and if a whip, then "*v'lap v'lap.*"

175 193 One of the Negro contributions which gives a delightful charm to the language is the principle of doubling, whether the word is adjective, adverb, verb, or pronoun. Faine cites the following examples:

ioun bel, bel femme—an extraordinarily beautiful woman.
li té bien, bien malade—he was very gravely ill.
li marcher, l'marcher, l'marcher—he kept on walking and walking.
li-minme, li-minme—it is really he himself.[8]

175 538 Still another and very important Negro contribution is the wealth of proverbs. A person may say practically anything he chooses in proverbs, particularly if he uses to its fullest the significant tones of which his voice is capable. As many as 1,500 of these proverbs have been collected, and there is reason to believe that as many more could be found.[9] In general they say the same things proverbs say in any language:

Fer couper fer. Il faut du fer pour couper le fer; which is to signify, "Great needs demand great remedies."

Tit cochon tit sang. Un petit cochon a peu de sang; that is, "From each according to his means."

Sel pas besoin vanter tête li. Le sel n'a pas besoin de se vanter; or, "Real merit never needs to boast."

Since some of the proverbs make allusions to elephants and tigers, animals not found in the Caribbean region, it is clear that these at least, and maybe others, go far back in the wisdom of the folk.

538 Storytelling is a well-cultivated art in Haiti. The folklore of Créole is rich, some of it bearing close resemblance to the Negro tales current in the southern United States, particularly the Br'er Rabbit tales. When a group gathers and a story is about to begin, the teller says, "Cric?"—as if to say, "Shall I tell you a story?" or, "Are you ready?" To this his listeners reply, "Crac!"—or, "Please do! Certainly!" or, "We are listening." The two words together make a sort of rapport between raconteur and audience, an overture, "Once upon a time."

8. Faine, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

9. J. J. Audain, *Proverbes* (Port-au-Prince, 1877), cites 1,011 Haitian proverbs in Créole, and E. Chenet, *Proverbes créoles* (Port-au-Prince, 1896), records 1,456 proverbs.